

... And now confusion over how she died?

Postpone election and set new date agreed by all

TRAGEDY is being reduced to the ludicrous. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto is shocking enough with ramifications not only for Pakistan but also for the region as a whole. But now the Pakistani government comes up with the questionable theory that the former prime minister died not from any gunshot wounds or bomb explosion but from hitting her head on the levers of the sunroof on her vehicle. A successful assassination has taken place, with three shots being fired at her before her assailant blew himself up. For the Islamabad authorities now to inform people that a hit on her head as she ducked killed her is not only bizarre but looks like a clear attempt to evade responsibility over their failure to ensure security for the PPP leader. What about all the eyewitness accounts, report by attending doctors, etc.

Pakistan is at the crossroads today. One way in which it can try tiding over the crisis is for the general elections scheduled for 8 January to be deferred for such time (but not too long a time) as will allow Pakistan's people and politicians to prepare for it in cool and composed manner. To expect that the elections can go ahead on schedule would be tantamount to imposing a decision on a country that is in shock and deep grief at the murder of inarguably its most popular political leader. Besides, Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party is in a state of disarray following her death and the Nawaz Sharif-led Muslim League has already decided to boycott the polls. In the circumstances, it will be prudent on the part of the government to get in touch with the PPP, the PML (N) and all other big parties in order to arrive at a consensus on an acceptable date for the elections. Meanwhile, the Pakistan authorities must go expeditiously into the job of following up on the evidence they say they have about an al-Qaeda link in the Bhutto assassination.

Continuing violence in the aftermath of the Bhutto assassination can only make conditions more fragile and tenuous than they are. If the country is not to mutate into a dysfunctional state, all stakeholders in its politics must come together to get their collective act together. The opposition, by rising to the occasion and taking part in the elections, must demonstrate that it is only an elected government that can combat terrorism and religious extremism in Pakistan.

'Nijhum Deep' becomes a tourist spot

There are many more such areas awaiting our attention

ONE must congratulate all those connected with the project, the Bangladeshi sponsor as well as the Upa Zillah Parishad for developing the island as a tourism and entertainment spot. Although the start is modest, the idea behind the action must be commended. It has been the demand of the local inhabitants who saw the vast potential of the area that is of immense natural beauty on the coast of Bangladesh, as a tourist location. This will also accrue to the local council 25 percent of the earning from enterprise.

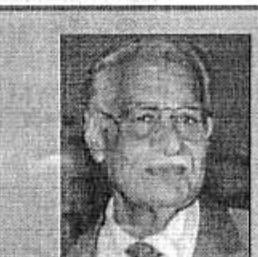
And this brings us to the very topical and important issue of tourism in Bangladesh. There are many such areas like 'Nijhum Deep' that can be and should be developed urgently as a tourist spot. What we tend to overlook is the fact that apart from serving the needs of tourists, both internal and foreign, this sector as an industry will help improve the socio-economic condition of the local people.

The vast potential for tourism that Bangladesh holds has, regrettably, not been exploited fully. We have two of the world's most scenic and beautiful natural spots. We have the longest sea beach and the largest mangrove forest in the world. Apart from the very diverse areas that can attract tourists, our geographical location puts it most suitably on the east-west air corridor linking it with South East Asia, another popular tourist destination.

Thus it needs no restating that our planners must get more deeply involved in integrating development of tourism in their parameters more intensely. There is a national tourism policy that was formulated in Feb 1972. It stemmed from the realisation that tourism in Bangladesh could add significantly to its economy. This sector was recognised as an industry that was to be given due importance in the annual development plan. Unfortunately such ideas have remained as lofty ideals till very recently, although there has been a spurt in this sector only recently that one notices.

Development of tourism involves concerted efforts of several ministries and agencies of the government. But above all it requires long term planning, of which we have never heard anything. Tourism in Bangladesh must be made tourist friendly. The potential for it to earn significant revenue, both from internal and foreign tourists should not be lost sight of. One wonders also whether for the sake of tourism in Bangladesh it would not be a good idea to de-link the national tourism corporation from the ministry of civil aviation.

Gujarat wins battle in hate



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

BETWEEN THE LINES

Yet the biggest drawback with the Congress is that -- this is not in Gujarat alone -- it does not come out as an unequivocal exponent of pluralism, as it should. The party gives the impression of being Hindutva's soft version. Considered to be carrying the ethos of freedom struggle, the Congress cannot afford to compromise on the ideals.

because the participation of people, without any distinction of religion and caste, is essential.

By creating hatred against a particular community, Modi created an atmosphere of bias and fear. Elections were free, but people had been brainwashed. The result was that the BJP, led by Modi, secured 117 seats in the 182-member house; five less than the 2002 election held after the Gujarat carnage.

Like the last time, he successfully played the anti-Muslim card and equated terrorism with Muslims. A poor second was the Congress with 62 seats. However, it increased its tally by 11 seats by winning in the riot-affected area, central Gujarat. The party bungled

were his two eyes.

Even when it was clear that Pakistan would be an Islamic republic, the resolve in India was to convert it into a secular state. If the nation wanted to have a Hindu *rashtra*, nobody could have stopped it from doing so because 80 percent of the population in the divided India was Hindu.

Still, the proposition was not even discussed because the ethos of freedom struggle was secularism. All communities had participated in the movement, and they wanted to sustain a multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

These principles were enshrined in the constitution. Hindutva was never envisaged, and Mahatma Gandhi declared after partition, in the midst of communal riots, that Hindus and Muslims

country's strength, and it can even break up if it is weakened. The reason why a big country like the Soviet Union disintegrated was the suppression of diverse communities in the name of communism. Modi is busy destroying India's integration and the BJP is trying to implement Hindutva, whatever it costs in terms of politics.

Still, the BJP is impaled on the horns of a dilemma. It cannot win India unless it sheds anti-Muslim bias. At the same time, it does not want to give up the Hindutva plank because its parochial line has given it dividends in some parts. It has its governments in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand and coalitions in Punjab and Bihar.

Since the party was nowhere near the independence movement, it never understood, much less appreciated, the ethos of pluralism that inspired the freedom struggle.

L.K. Advani, a top BJP leader, got rapped on his knuckles by the RSS, the party's mentor, when he praised Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah for having reflected a secular outlook in the speech after parti-

tion, that Pakistan and India were two nations; Muslims and Hindus can go freely to their mosque or temple and should not mix religion with politics.

The RSS never forgave him, and, he, on his part, was on the defensive and practically withdrew his remark. When it comes to Hindutva, the RSS brooks no dissent. In fact, the re-election of Modi, with the margin he has secured, is going to influence the BJP's strategy of tomorrow.

The party's position on Kashmir may become more intractable because it would not like compromising on such an issue, particularly when even the comparatively liberal Atal Behari Vajpayee has withdrawn to the shadows. The main casualty of Modi's victory may be the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the platform on which different regional parties have come together to prove a majority in the Lok Sabha.

Vajpayee ruled the country for six years through this alliance. Now Advani is looking forward to it.

Regional parties may not like to

sup with Modi, who spews hate because they have their Muslim supporters to reckon with. BJP president Rajnath Singh may go on repeating that the party has won in Gujarat, and Modi may also be saying so. But the fact remains that Modi kept even the party leadership out.

Like a camel, he has entered the tent. He is going to ask for space, which the central leadership will have to concede. Advani's remark that Modi's election is a turning point in national politics may well be true. But the turning point is going to be the re-thinking on the part of BJP's allies.

Except the Shiv Sena from Maharashtra, there does not seem to be any party siding with the BJP. They have secular credentials. They cannot go to the voters with Modi as the BJP's mascot. The Muslims command 15 to 18 percent of the electorate, and it is crucial in about 150 Lok Sabha seats.

Modi's advantage begins and ends in Gujarat, because the Muslim vote in the state is only eight percent. That is the reason

why allies of the BJP appealed to it not to send Modi when they were fighting their election for the assembly.

The Congress is still learning its lesson from Gujarat. Party president Sonia Gandhi, is a crowd puller but not the vote catcher. No use re-emphasising that Rahul Gandhi is not making any impact. Younger leaders in the Congress, and persons like Lalu Prasad Yadav who is on the side of the Congress, might have done better if they had campaigned.

Yet the biggest drawback with the Congress is that -- this is not in Gujarat alone -- it does not come out as an unequivocal exponent of pluralism, as it should. The party gives the impression of being Hindutva's soft version. Considered to be carrying the ethos of freedom struggle, the Congress cannot afford to compromise on the ideals. The BJP is understandably against secularism, but a diluted, half-hearted Congress can do only harm. It is sad that the party is not conscious of that.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Benazir's assassination: Implications and lessons

Let us have no illusions here: this is now a battle, perhaps the final critical one, between the forces of civil society and democracy held hostage, and militant obscurantism and military jingoism striking back.

TARIQ KARIM

I had grave reservations about the manner in which Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan two months ago after a reported power-sharing "deal" with President-General Musharraf. That deal had revived bad memories about an earlier deal struck between her father and another general, with fateful consequences for the future of Pakistan and the region.

Nevertheless, I admired her gutsy return to Pakistan after the first assassination attempt on her in Karachi shortly after her return from exile by a suicide bomber that resulted in massive collateral casualties. Benazir Bhutto knew fully well the personal risk she was taking when she returned from Dubai, and she had admitted that she was fearful for her own life and safety, but declared that there was all the more reason for her to return to hold high the banner of democracy -- in that defiant act of courage, she redeemed herself of all her past blemishes, whether real or merely perceived, and regained for herself the center stage as democracy's leading champion in Pakistan.

Benazir Bhutto was targeted by the militant-Islamists because she was a multi-dimensional symbol of everything that the latter opposed -- she was a woman leader, with secular western education, a champion of democracy who had become a rallying point for all forces of tolerance and pluralism, she had allied with and was openly seen to be backed by Washington,

and that she had declared publicly that she would join hands with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan to fight the Taliban and root fundamentalism in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The initial attempt on her life, although that failed, was a clear warning shot across the bows that she was viewed as a serious threat by the Taliban and that she had to be physically removed from the scene. The aim of the militant-Islamists was obvious -- intimidate her and other moderate leadership across Pakistan, and Pakistani civil society as a whole, into retreating into a shell once again. The initial reaction, of widespread rage and violence across Pakistan, in the hours following her brutal murder, is testimony to the contrary.

However, the cynic in me also naggingly suggests that one cannot rule out entirely the possibility that forces inimical to democracy and mutually accommodative pluralism may also be involved in fanning the flames of violence, setting the scene for the military to step in once again. The target of post-Bhutto assassination has been, predominantly, the symbols of government (and party) linked with General Musharraf, who is also viewed by the Taliban through the same jaundiced lens through which they looked at Benazir Bhutto, and considered (as she was) an American stooge.

This might prima facie appear as somewhat convoluted, and self-contradictory, but is it? My reading and understanding of our region's history (and I include

Bangladesh) tells me that the shift to the right and the creeping annexation of middle grounds by the radical forces of obscurantism and militant Islam, have taken place inexorably under the watch of successive military regimes. The Taliban and other assorted militant-Islamist forces have progressively expanded their influence and political clout during earlier military regimes in Pakistan, and most brazenly so during General Musharraf's 8-year-watch.

When General Musharraf assumed power (illegally, in my analysis written in an op-ed in this paper on April 18, 2000 titled "Quo Vadis, Pakistan?"), he had done so with the promise that he was going to wipe out corruption, bring corrupt politicians to book, and restore clean democracy all within two years (does that sound familiar?).

He convicted the prime minister he deposed, and instituted corruption cases against the other former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, and drove them both into exile (thus establishing the "minus-two formula" as a model for emulation by others). I had questioned some of those premises and assertions at that time. Let me recall some of the words I wrote then here:

"In the South Asian tradition, such leaders do not simply fade away, and today's villains can well bounce back as tomorrow's heroes. Remember Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was written off in 1977? It took her less than a year to return with triumph to centre stage.

The Military Establishment in Pakistan has transformed into a

firing the service chiefs. But as has happened so often in Pakistan, the tail wagged the dog. The military coup was illegal. Merely having indulged in it so often in the past and quoting precedence does not give it legal status or justify it. If military coups could have been the panacea to the problems of a country or its peoples, its virtues would have supplanted democratic or other institutions of governance in many parts of the world.

The instruments of fanaticism which Pakistan helped create in Afghanistan are now, like the proverbial chicken, all coming home to roost. Rumblings of how little General Musharraf has progressed on his many promises, all old wine in new bottles, are beginning to be muttered. The general is riding a tiger, and therein lies the danger, for this will leave him with no option but to cling on desperately to it and prolong his ride for as long as he can."

Touting himself as a champion against the Taliban, General Musharraf succeeded in endearing himself in the myopic vision of the West (read America here), and milked the latter for all she was worth while prolonging his stay for another seven years since I wrote my earlier piece. But how much has all the oil poured into Pakistan succeeded in containing, or routing, the forces of militant Islam? On the contrary, it brought those forces to the very heart of Pakistan's capital, as the Red Mosque episode so strikingly proclaimed to the world. And now the blow-back of Talibanisation to Pakistan from its rout in 1991 in Afghanistan, has reversed direction. After establishing what appears to be well-established and well consolidated beachheads within Pakistan, it is in the process of invading Afghanistan.

So what is President Musharraf, and Pakistan, going to do now? The temptation on the part of the lately (and very reluctantly) civilianised president would, I suspect be very strong to re-impose a state of emergency, perhaps even invoke a return to martial law. That has been the traditional, knee-jerk response of military leaders espousing their exceptionalism in our part of the world. That would be the worst service that they can do for Pakistan, or for the cause of democracy.

Let us have no illusions here: this is now a battle, perhaps the final critical one, between the forces of civil society and democracy held hostage, and militant obscurantism and military jingoism striking back. Just as militancy (of any sort) tends to feed on itself to grow, the democratic process too can only grow and expand if it is allowed to feed on itself, so to speak.

The process, admittedly is not without flaws, and will usher in through its traversing course many unsavoury characters as players. But in the end, as the histories of other more mature and better established democracies elsewhere so palpably and clearly demonstrate, the system redeems itself, by empowering the people whom it serves. It matures in direct proportion to the maturing of its civil society. No amount of artificially contrived and brutally enforced political engineering can short-circuit this evolutionary process.

Let Bangladeshis take heed of what is happening in Pakistan -- and take the lessons to heart.

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Possible aftermath of the elections



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

HERE is little doubt that mankind's evolutionary journey for the most optimum ideological system of governance that occurred in the past, the possibility still remains that power, if given to the unelected few, could also be abused. Since it would be difficult to devise a system in developing countries where poverty reigns supreme yet in which only honest and dedicated politicians would lead the country, elections would continue to remain a gamble because voting would be done on the basis of promises that mostly had not been kept in the past.

If economic development is given precedence over liberal democracy by opting for "bureaucratic-authoritarianism" or "developmental dictatorship" then the end point of history is yet to be arrived at. The inequity one sees, particularly in the least developed countries like Bangladesh, in people battered by poverty created by both man and nature, lends credence to some scholars' economicistic (capitalism versus socialism) theory of democratic development whereby "the developmental principle of democracy is vitiated by the extractive principle of capitalism."

One can argue that in the early stages of western industrialisation, human values were routinely sacrificed on the altar of economic needs. Extension of this argument can also lead us to the possibility of net transfer of power to a chosen minority by the larger populace as prescribed by democracy, albeit for a certain period, and the further possibility that the "chosen few" could choose

GOING DEEPER

One can argue that both democracy and development may be achieved simultaneously, albeit at a slower pace. Bangladeshis, having won independence through blood and tears, are more likely to opt for popular sovereignty than to give away this right to a chosen few, however impeccable their credentials may be.

to be accountable to the electorate and prefer to conduct public affairs for personal benefit.

Paradoxically, if democracy is sacrificed due to fear of misgovernance that occurred in the "universalisation of western liberal democracy" as the end point of history is yet to be arrived at. The inequity one sees, particularly in the least developed countries like Bangladesh, in people battered by poverty created by both man and nature, lends credence to some scholars' economicistic (capitalism versus socialism) theory of democratic development whereby "the developmental principle of democracy is vitiated by the extractive principle of capitalism."

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whether, in situations where calls for "duty to protect" do not exist and where fundamental rights are not trodden upon at will, whether "illiberal" democracy should not be acceptable.

There can be no debate on the right of the people to determine their fate as the optimum political course to be followed. The western liberal democracies, developed through stages of absolute monarchy, feudalism, and authoritarianism, have now reached the stage of liberal democracy, where the elected representatives remain accountable to the electorate because the people retain the ultimate power to elect or reject, or even recall, their elected representatives.

Some scholars have identified factors that serve promotion of democracy, such as the level of economic development, culture of democracy in any given society, demonstrated effects of the practice of democracy in neighbouring countries and, most importantly, craving in the people for democracy, as necessary preconditions for the practice of democracy.

But many of the developing countries, including Bangladesh, formation of a National Security Council to oversee the implementation of the projects undertaken by the government, even though it has been elected by the people.

lack some of these qualities. And, given the inconceivable scale of corruption indulged in by the immediate past alliance government, many people in Bangladesh are wondering whether, through the coming elections, another band of rogues will capture power.

The most recent referendum in Venezuela, denying President Hugo Chavez the opportunity to be elected president for life, has demonstrated that people would like to reserve their right to take the final decision when the time comes. The problem arises that, since direct participatory democracy by the people is impossible in the present day context given the size of the territory and the number of people involved in any election, a mechanism may have to be devised to ensure that the wishes of the people are faithfully implemented.

In Bangladesh, reforms of the institutions supportive of democracy undertaken by the interim government is likely to ensure a degree of confidence in the people. One may, however, consider formation of a National Security Council to oversee the implementation of the projects undertaken by the government, even though it has been elected by the people.

One may,